Maria Hertogh

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Maria Hertogh (Riots, Background)

Maria Bertha Hertogh a.k.a. Nadra bte Maarof (sometimes spelt Natra) (b. 24 March 1937, Tjimahi, Java, Indonesia - d. 8 July 2009, Huijbergen, Netherlands) was the central focus of racial riots in December 1950, sparked off by controversy over her custody between her Malay-Muslim foster mother Aminah and her Dutch-Catholic parents, the Hertoghs. She was nicknamed Putih meaning "white" by Aminah.   
  
**Early Life**Maria was the third child of seven children that Adeline Hertogh bore. She was baptised Maria Bertha Hertogh by her Dutch-Eurasian parents. The Japanese invasion of Java during World War II saw Maria's father become a prisoner-of-war in 1943. Struggling alone and pregnant with their sixth child, Adeline gave Maria to the care of a family friend, Aminah bte Mohammad, on 15 November 1942. The process was witnessed by Adeline's brother, Soewaldi. Maria was brought to Bandung, raised as a Muslim and given the name Nadra bte Maarof at her circumcision a year later.  
  
Aminah and Maria moved to Jakarta for one period but soon returned to Bandung, where Aminah's fluency in Japanese enabled her to work as an interpreter for the Japanese military police. In 1947, fearing that Maria's Dutch background made her vulnerable during the Indonesian War of Independence, Aminah and Maria fled to Terengganu, Malaysia. She grew up in Aminah's hometown Kemaman, Terengganu, where Aminah was highly regarded. Studying at Chukai Malay Girls' School, Kemaman, Maria also was trained in Koran reading outside school hours by an ustazah.  
  
**Developments**  
Reunited after the war, Maria's parents began seeking for their lost daughter in the late 1940s. They lodged a request with Dutch officials to locate their daughter. Arthur Locke, the Administrative Officer (East), was the first to alert authorities to Maria's whereabouts when he spotted her at a school competition in Kemaman. A custody battle then ensued over Maria, which, through sensationalist press reports, drew much public attention and fuelled religious sensitivities.  
  
Initially, custody of Maria was given to Aminah. Within four days of the ruling, on 1 August 1950, Maria was married off to Mansoor Adabi, a 22-year-old teacher at Bukit Panjang Government School heading a second-year Normal Class. The marriage of the juvenile 13-year old-Maria was raised in court, at Adeline's appeal for custody over Maria. On 2 December 1950, custody over Maria was gained by Adeline who whisked her to Amsterdam, Netherlands. On 11 December 1950, riots were sparked off over the custodial ruling, resulting in the death of at least 18 people.  
  
Maria married a Dutch cabinet maker, Johan (Joep) Gerardus Wolkenfeld, on 20 April 1956 and they had 13 children, three of whom did not survive infancy. However, a 1975 television production on Maria's story stirred up Maria's unhappy memories and led her to tragic actions. Miserable over working at her husband's cafe-cum-bar, the "T Pumpke", from early morning to midnight, she plotted to murder her husband through two friends but the plans were found out and she was brought to court on 16 August 1976. However, after reviewing her tragic past, Maria was acquitted within one day of hearing. Her marriage ended by the 1980s. She died of leukaemia on 8 July 2009, at her residence in Huijbergen, Netherlands.  
  
**Family**  
Grandmother: Louise Winterberg a.k.a. Nor Louise. A Eurasian of Indo-Dutch parentage. She had left her Scottish husband, Joseph Hunter for an Indonesian opera actor Raden Ismail. She gained fame as a Bangsawan performer and through this became friends with Aminah.   
Uncle: Soewaldi, son of Louise Winterberg through Hunter. Converted to Islam  
Father: Adrianus Petrus Hertogh (*b. 1905*), army sergeant with the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army. He is of Dutch origins. He married Adeline Hunter on 23 December 1938.

The Maria Hertogh Riots between ethnic Malays and the European and Eurasian communities in Singapore occurred on 11 December 1950. The riots took place over a period of three days and saw at least 18 people killed and 173 people injured. It was sparked by the controversial custody battle between Maria's adoptive Malay family and her Eurasian parents.  
  
**Background**Maria Hertogh, born to Dutch-Eurasian parents in Java, was adopted during the war by an Indonesian Muslim woman named Aminah.  When Maria's father was arrested by the Japanese, Maria's mother gave Maria to Aminah to be raised. She was given the Muslim name Nadra. In 1947, Aminah moved to Trengganu with Maria.   
  
After the war, the Hertoghs launched a legal battle for the custody of their daughter after they received information in 1949 of her whereabouts in Malaya. The custody battle attracted intense media attention worldwide. Photographs in newspapers of a Muslim girl in a Catholic convent and claims that she had bowed down to the Virgin Mary affected religious sensitivities and whipped up emotions. The Muslim side was championed by Indian Muslim Karim Ghani. As editor of the Jawi daily, Dawn, Ghani instigated emotions within the Muslim community by publishing controversial reports of the case. He also worked out an extensive plan for 1,500 girls to protest in a procession. Exhortations were made at the Sultan Mosque to wage a holy war to force the return of Maria to Aminah. At the appeal hearing on 11 December 1950, the Judge dismissed Aminah's appeal and custody was given to Adeline Hunter, her biological mother. Upon hearing the judgement, huge crowds outside the court rioted, convinced that the colonial laws, the courts and the legal system were prejudiced against Muslims.  
  
**Casualties**  
For three days, mobs of Malay and Indian Muslim rioters attacked any European and Eurasian in sight. They set up barricades along major roads, set cars and houses on fire and took control of districts in the vicinity of Sultan Mosque, North Bridge Road and Jalan Besar. Rioting was stopped only after two troops of the Internal Security Battalion were called in, supported by several Malays within the troops. Even so, scattered attacks continued over two days. A 24-hour curfew had to be imposed for two weeks before British and Malay troops and the Constabulary regained control of the situation.  
  
Altogether, 18 people were killed and 173 were injured. Nine were killed by rioters while the others were killed by policemen. Aside from a Police Inspector and a Special Constable, those killed by rioters had little to do with the Hertogh case and their murder was motivated more by fanaticism and racial hatred.  
  
**Significance and Consequences**  
The riots highlighted the insensitive way the media handled religious and racial issues in Singapore. The British colonial authorities also failed to defuse an explosive situation when emotional reports appeared in the local press of the custody battle accompanied by sensational media photographs of a Muslim girl in a Catholic convent.  
  
Although the rioters were mainly Malays, they included a large number of foreigners including Indian, Pakistani and Indonesian Muslims. Added to this, the mainly Malay Police Force appeared to sympathise with the Muslim rioters and displayed some measure of deliberate inaction and defection during the riots. Gurkha Police Riot Squad Detachment, constituting at least 149 men were unfortunately not utilised and were in fact withdrawn at critical locations.  
  
As a result of this historic event, the Government of Singapore, upon independence in 1965, instituted legislation against racial discrimination. It became an offence to incite racial and religious hatred in Singapore. The local media exercised greater discipline in the coverage of sensitive issues. National integration and nation-building took top priority in the formulation of government policies.  
  
**Time-line**  
**1950** : The Hertoghs filed a lawsuit in the courts of Singapore, seeking to assert their parental rights over Maria.  
**22 Apr 1950** : The court ruled that Maria should be returned to her biological parent after a period of care under the Social Welfare Department.  
**28 Jul 1950** : Maria was returned to Aminah after the latter appealed against the decision. Shortly after, Maria married a 22-year-old Malay teacher.  
**13 Nov 1950** : The Hertoghs appealed the decision and the courts ruled in their favour on the basis that Maria was removed from them without their consent. Upon her return to her biological parents, the court further ruled that Maria should be subject to Dutch laws where it was illegal for minors below the age of 16 to be married. Hence, Maria's marriage was declared null and void and she was placed in protective custody at a Catholic convent, the Girls' Home of the Convent of the Good Shepherd, prior to her return to the Netherlands.  
**11 Dec 1950** : An appeal hearing for Aminah's case was dismissed leading the waiting crowds outside the courts to riot.  
**12 Dec 1950** : Maria is flown to Holland with her parents to be reunited with her family.  
**13 Dec 1950** : Order is restored in Singapore.

Maria Hertogh Summary

* Maria was Adeline Hertogh’s third child, born on March 24th,1937
* Father became a POW during World War II
* Was given to Aminah bte Mohammed on 15 November 1942
* Brought to Bandung and raised as a muslim
* Aminah worked as a Japanese translater
* In 1947, fled to Malaysia
* Maria parent’s lodged a request with Dutch officials to find Maria
* When found, custody battle ensued
* Custody of Maria was initially given to Aminah
* Adeline requested for an appeal and won on 2nd December 1950
* Maria was shifted to Amsterdam, Netherlands
* On 11th December 1950, riots were sparked, leading to the death of at least 18 people
* Rioters believed that the colonial law, courts and legal system were prejudiced against Muslims
* Riots went on for three days
* Rioters included Singaporean Malays, Indians and Pakistani Muslims
* Showed the media’s insensitivity towards religious and racial issues in Singapore